

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



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Back to School- How to Pack a Safe Lunch For Your Kids

September marks the end of summer, the beginning of fall, and for some the return to school. Along with getting the kids geared up with new school clothes and new school supplies something else to consider is school lunches. Ensuring that they are fully prepared for that first day should also include assuring that what they eat is as safe as possible. Children have developing immune systems which means that they are more susceptible to foodborne illness. Taking a few precautions when preparing your little one's lunch can make your child's first day of school memorable.

- Start it off right from the beginning- wash your hands prior to and during food preparation. Store food in clean containers. Don't just dump the crumbs out of containers from the previous day. Wipe out lunch boxes with soap and water. Scrub apples and other fruit to remove dirt and pesticides.
- Keep things cool. Use kid- friendly insulated lunch bags or lunch boxes to keep items at 41°F or below. Cut sandwiches into smaller portions to ensure that they stay evenly cooled. Chilling the food and bag over night can help keep items cold until lunch time. Mini ice packs, frozen juice boxes and water bottles are also good ways to help keep food items cool.
- Know what needs to be chilled. Items that are normally in the refrigerator such as string cheese, yogurt, lunchmeat, and leftovers will need to remain cool until meal time. Fruits and veggies are fine at room temperature but taste better cold.
- Keep hot food hot. Lunches containing items, such as soup and chili should be kept at 135°F or above by using an insulated container. If using a thermos, preheat the thermos with hot water and let stand for a few minutes, then refill with hot food.
- Don't use the same water bottle over and over again without proper washing and refrigeration. Food particles and germs can accumulate and harbor bacteria that can make a child sick.
- Pack a hand wipe. Always encourage your child to wash their hands prior to eating. Packing a hand wipe sends a subtle reminder that they should wash their hands before delving into that scrumptious lunch.

For more information on safe food handling practices contact the San Bernardino County, Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Services at (909) 884-4056 or visit our website at www.sbcountry.gov/dehs.

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